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Changes over a ten-year interval in the prevalence of teacher targeted bullying

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to describe changes in the prevalence of teacher multi-targeted workplace bullying in Estonia by means of a repeated cross-sectional design comparing two studies conducted 10 years apart. A comparison was conducted between participants from teachers' self reports (n=573) in 2003 and those of (n=564) in 2013. The findings show a substantial increase during ten years in the prevalence of teacher targeted bullying in the teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships across different categories of victimization: Threat to professional status, threat to personal standing, isolation, and physical aggression.

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Keywords: Teachers; bullying; workplace victimization; school setting

1. Introduction

Bullying in a school context has received attention over number of years and literature in this area is multinational over three decades with plenty of research findings about bullying among students (overview: Smith, 2011) and among schoolteachers at workplace (e. g. Edelmann & Woodall, 1997; Hubert & van Veldhoven, 2001; Malinauskiene, Obelenis, & Bopagiene, 2005).

Most studies of school (Smith, 2011) and workplace (Coyne, 2011) bullying define bullying by means of three criteria: (1) bullying is when someone directs aggressive behavior towards another or intentionally hurts and harms

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target person; (2) bullying occurs repeatedly over a lengthy period of time; and (3) there exists an imbalance of power with the person being subjected to bullying cannot defend him- or herself.

Workplace bullying in schools overwhelms complex dynamics (Parsons, 2005): at one side, teachers may be bullied by: other teachers, students, staff, principals, parents; and on the other side, teachers may bully other teachers, staff, principals, parents and students (e. g. teachers bullying students: Delfabbro et al, 2006; McEvoy, 2005; Twemlow & Fongy, 2005).

Teacher-targeted bullying at workplace is a issue of international studies providing evidence about its overall prevalence: in Spain study among five different working populations (included teachers) indicated that about one-fifth respondents defined themselves as victims (Jennifer, Cowei & Ananiadou, 2003); in South Africa an half of the secondary school teachers reported that they were victims of bullying (De Wet; 2006); in Turkey it was revealed that 50% of primary school teachers experienced victimization due to bullying at work (Cemaloglu, 2007); in Ireland about 31% of principals reported that educators in their nursery, primary, secondary and special school had reported being the victim of bullying behavior (McGuckin & Lewis, 2008); in Croatia 22% teachers have exposed to bullying by others and 32% have witnessed it at least once in the previous 12 months at workplace (Russo et al., 2008); in Australian schools nearly all (about 99%) of teachers have experienced some forms of bullying during their employment (Riley, Duncan, Edwards (2011); in Estonia about one-fifth of teachers reported of repeated workplace bullying experience (Kõiv, 2011); national report in UK (NASUWT, 2012) among teachers indicated that 67% of respondents had either experienced or witnessed adult workplace bullying during the prior 12 months; in US findings indicate that approximately half of all teachers reported at least one form of victimization within the current or previous year (McMahon et al., 2014).

Despite differences in teacher-targeted victimization rates due to methodological differences between studies, the teacher targeted bullying at work is a problem which is quite widespread, but has received relatively little attention to teachers as multiple targeted victims in the school settings (Benefield, 2004; Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Kõiv, 2011; McGuckin & Lewis, 2008; Riley, Duncan, & Edwards, 2011; NASUWT, 2012) compared with teacher-targeted bullying from pupils (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & O'Brennan, 2011; De Wet, 2006, 2010a, 2010b; 2012; De Wet & Jacobs, 2006; James, Lawlor, Courtney, Flynn & Murphy, 2008; Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012; Ozkilic & Kartal, 2012; Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998). Thus, the teacher-targeted bullying from students, parents, staff, and principals is a cross-bordered problem in schools, whereby the assessment of teacher-targeted bullying mostly focuses on victimization by students (also called "educator targeted bullying" by De Wet, 2006, 2012 or "cross-peer abuse" by Terry, 1998) compared with teachers' victimization experiences generated by other perpetrators at workplace.

Methodologically, studies on issues of teacher targeted bullying (1) have looked predominantly at the problem from the perspective of the teachers (e.g. Benefield, 2004; Bradshaw et al., 2007; De Wet & Jacobs, 2006; Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012; McGuckin & Lewis, 2008; Pervin & Turner, 1998; Riley, Duncan & Edwards, 2011; Terry, 1998) versus only few (James et al., 2008; Terry, 1998) give the possible perpetrators perspective on the topic; and (2) most of the studies (e. g. all the above researchers) have used surveys to collect their data versus few (e.g. Fahie & Devine, 2014; De Wet, 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Matsela & Kirsten 2014; Munday, 2003) have introduced qualitative approach to the topic.

However, existing international studies of bullying prevalence provide not much evidence about its trends over time (1) in youth bullying: Molcho et al. (2009) had educed from international cross-sectional survey that bullying among students generally declined between 1994 and 2006; Rigby & Smith (2011) reviewed trend information for bullying on the international level and concluded that the prevalence of bullying among students generally decreased between 1990 and 2009; Kim, Boyce, Koh and Leventhal (2009) found among Korean students the modest decrease of prevalence of victims while perpetrator prevalence was stable over the time between 2000 and 2001; Finkelhor (2013) showed from US national data a substantial declines in face-to-face bullying and peer related victimizations at school from the 1990s to 2007; and (2) in teacher-targeted bullying: survey data from national report in UK (NASUWT, 2012) showed that teachers workplace bullying tended to be (no statistical differences were calculated) more prevalent in 2011 than in 1995.

These challenges suggest that there is a need to gather data from teachers' self-reports about their experiences of workplace victimization, assess victimization based on multiple perpetrators, and assess various types of

victimization taking into account trends over time in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of teacher targeted bullying in the school settings. The key research question was evoked - to what degree different types of bullying reveal in teacher-children and teacher-adults relationships viewing teachers as targets of bullying in the schools during last ten years.

The aim of the study was to compare the extent of different types of bullying experienced by teachers in teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships in the year 2003 and ten years later.

The following two research tasks were established: (1) to ascertain the prevalence of different types of bullying of teachers by children (pupils) and adults (parents, other teachers, administrative and maintenance staff) in school settings in the year 2003 and 10 years later; and (2) to ascertain the differences in the extent of different categories (threat to professional status, threat to personal standing, isolation, physical aggression) of bullying experienced by teachers across five types of relationships in school settings in the year 2003 and 2013.

It was hypothesed that teacher targeted bullying by pupils, other teachers, administrative staff, and parents would involve a greater proportion of victimization rates in 2013 than ten year earlier.

2. Method

2.1. Study design and selection of subjects

The repeated cross-sectional survey consisting of two representative separate samples of teachers at two different points in time (year 2003 and ten years later), was conducted to describe changes in the prevalence of teacher targeted bullying in Estonia, whereby the criteria for selection of subjects was the same. Schools were chosen to obtain a representative sample – research sample schools were selected from all (16) separate districts from Estonia representing one randomly selected school from each district, whereby the ratio of different types of schools (basic schools versus gymnasium: 6 versus 4) among sample of schools corresponds to the whole-country school sample. All teaches from randomly selected 6 schools were included to the research sample of the study in the year 2003 and 2013 to estimate changes in rates of victimizations of teachers. Repeated cross-sectional studies conducted in the same areas by the same author, and using an identical research instrument comparing two representative teachers' population-based studies.

In the year 2003 the sample consisted of 573 teachers: 490 females (85.5%) and 83 males (14.5%). The mean age of the subjects in this year was 42.9 years (SD = 9.1) with youngest subject was 23 years old and the oldest was 63 years old.

In the year 2013 the sample consisted of 564 teachers: 476 females (84.4%) and 88 males (15.6%). The mean age of the subjects in the year 2013 was 43.8 years (SD = 10.8). The youngest subject was 22 years old and the oldest was 69 years old.

2.2. Instrument

An instrument for the measurement of prevalence of different types of bullying of teachers by children and by adults in school settings was developed and consisted of 15 items describing acts harming or hurting the target person. Participants were introduced to the following definition of bullying in the workplace: *Bullying is negative behavior that occurs repeatedly over time, and causes distress. It characterized as a dyadic power imbalance between bully and target*. It was instructed to view themselves as victims of bullying. In this exploration of bullying to participants, a questionnaire was constructed following the pattern established by Olweus (1999), and adapted to include the contingency of bullying by adults (parents, other teachers, administrative staff, and maintenance staff) and children (pupils) in school settings. Viewing teachers as multiple-targeted victims the frequency of different types of bullying was investigated. Subjects were asked: *How often have the following incidences happened to you in different relationships in your present workplace over the last six month?* and were given 15 bullying-type experiences based on typology of workplace bullying (Rayner & Hoel, 1997) and adapted to include only general bullying: (1) threat to professional status: accusation regarding lack of effort, belittling opinion, public humiliation;

(2) threat to personal standing: devaluation, insults, intimidation, name-calling, offensive remarks, shouting, slandering; (3) isolation: physical isolation, withholding of information. One general category of bullying was added - physical aggressive behavior: physical attack, threatening with position, and threatening with violence. For reporting purposes, from overall 15 items of questionnaire the four victimization categories (threat to professional status; threat to personal standing; isolation, and physical aggression) were formed and average measures were calculated for each categories.

Participants answered each item using one of four response alternatives, with scores ranging from 0 to 3: never = 0; seldom = 1; often = 2; very often = 3. According to the definition of bullying as repeated aggressive behavior, victims of bullying were identified as those who have been bullied "often" or "very often". Chi-square tests (for paired samples) were conducted on the percent of teachers who reported victimization to assess for significant differences between study groups.

3. Results

In order to explore the differences in the extent of different types of victimization experienced by teachers in teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships in 2003 and ten years later, χ^2-tests were performed for each type of bullying. The results of these analyses are presented in the Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. The percentage of teachers who have been victimized often or very often during last six month on each of the 15 victimization items in different bullying relationships in 2003 and 2013.

Items: Types of bullying	Bullying of teachers by pupils		Bullying of teachers by other teachers		Bullying of teachers by administrative staff		Bullying of teachers by parents		Bullying of teachers by maintenance staff	
	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013
Accusation regarding lack of effort	4.5	20.5	2.0	4.9	1.3	7.4	1.6	6.8	0.3	1.9
Belittling opinion	5.3	26.5	3.0	11.1	3.3	14.2	1.0	6.2	0.7	1.9
Devaluation	5.0	20.4	0.7	2.5	0.0	0.6	0.3	1.3	0.3	0.6
Insults	14.7	33.3	2.9	11.0	3.7	14.2	1.9	13.6	0.1	1.1
Intimidation	3.7	12.9	0.3	3.8	3.4	11.1	1.7	13.6	0.0	0.6
Name-calling	9.3	13.0	0.1	1.2	0.0	2.3	0.3	1.9	0.3	0.6
Offensive remarks	19.1	36.4	4.3	10.7	7.6	28.4	9.0	28.4	0.3	7.3
Physical attack	1.0	3.9	0.0	0.6	0.3	0.6	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.6
Physical isolation	1.3	2.5	1.3	8.6	1.0	6.8	1.0	2.5	0.4	1.2
Public humiliations	5.4	18.5	2.0	9.3	1.9	14.8	1.4	12.3	0.0	4.8
Shouting	20.8	37.0	2.6	15.4	2.0	12.3	2.6	10.5	0.3	4.1
Slandering	8.0	21.6	8.0	18.5	0.0	10.5	5.7	14.2	0.3	0.6

Table 2. Comparison of teacher victimization items in 2003 and 2013 (χ^2-values).

Items: Types of bullying	Bullying of teachers by pupils	Bullying of teachers by other teachers	Bullying of teachers by administrative staff	Bullying of teachers by parents	Bullying of teachers by maintenance staff
	2003 vs. 2013	2003 vs. 2013	2003 vs. 2013	2003 vs. 2013	2003 vs. 2013
Accusation regarding lack of effort	13.9**	5.2*	6.1*	4.1*	2.1
Belittling opinion	22.2**	6.8*	16.6**	5.2**	1.0
Devaluation	21.4**	1.2	0.4	0.7	0.0
Insults	18.7**	10.5**	19.7**	20.1**	2.0
Intimidation	16.3**	5.3*	9.4**	22.3**	0.0
Name-calling	1.9	2.0	3.7	1.9	0.0
Offensive remarks	12.5**	13.7**	23.9**	25.4**	8.7**
Physical attack	3.9*	0.4	0.0	2.0	0.0
Physical isolation	0.6	5.9*	11.8**	1.1	0.6
Public humiliations	23.4**	9.9**	7.3**	10.8**	4.1*
Shouting	19.4**	19.4**	9.8**	9.8**	4.0*
Slandering	21.3**	25.9**	20.7**	11.7**	0.4
Threatening with violence	3.4	2.9	3.6	2.0	0.3
Threatening with position	1.8	0.5	4.1*	7.3**	2.1
Withholding of information	7.8*	2.6	4.2*	1.9	2.8

*p < .05. **p < .01.

It was revealed that offensive remarks, shouting, insults, and slandering (verbal direct forms of threat to personal standing) were commonly experienced types of bullying of teachers by pupils, other teachers, administrative staff and school maintenance staff in year 2003 and ten years later, with students as major sources of workplace bullying experienced by teachers.

Teacher victimization forms were examined across the five perpetrator categories (student, parent, other teachers, administrative staff and school maintenance staff) and there was a trend for a high proportion of teachers in 2013 than in year 2003 to describe bullying by students (11 types of bullying from all 15), other teachers (9 from 15 types), administrative staff (11 types from 15), parents (9 from 15), and school maintenance staff (3 from 15 types of bullying). This trend would have been significant at the .05 or .01 level.

Verbal direct forms of victimization of teachers (threat to professional status: accusation regarding lack of effort, belittling opinion, public humiliation; and threat to personal standing: insults, intimidation, offensive remarks, shouting, slandering) across all perpetrator categories (except: maintenance staff) tended to be more prevalent in the year 2013 than in the year 2013.

Different types of isolation (indirect bullying) and direct physical forms of bullying were clearly unprevalent and among the last frequent were physical attacks and threatening with violence with only modest increase during ten year period across different relationships levels in the school setting.

The analysis of the categories of teachers' victimization rates in different relationship levels indicated that teachers as victims of bullying experienced significantly greater threat to personal and professional status, isolation, and physical aggression in the interpersonal relationships with pupils and with adults (parents, other teachers, administrative staff and school maintenance staff) in the year 2013 compared with results gathered in the year 2003, whereby all differences were statistically significant (Table 3 and 4).

Table 3. The percentage of teachers who have been victimized often or very often during last six month across four categories of victimization in 2003 and 2013.

Categories of victimization	Bullying of teachers by pupils		Bullying of teachers by other teachers		Bullying of teachers by administrative staff		Bullying of teachers by parents		Bullying of teachers by maintenance staff	
	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013	2003	2013
Threat to professional status	12.7	21.9	3.0	19.8	2.5	12.1	2.0	8.5	0.3	2.3
Threat to personal standing	11.5	20.6	2.1	9.8	2.2	11.4	3.0	25.8	0.6	2.2
Isolation	2.8	6.5	2.0	7.1	0.7	6.5	2.0	5.5	0.2	0.7
Physical aggression	1.5	4.2	0.4	1.2	1.1	3.2	1.1	3.9	0.0	1.4

Table 4. Comparison of teacher victimization in 2003 and 2013 (χ^2-values).

Categories of victimization	Bullying of teachers by pupils	Bullying of teachers by other teachers	Bullying of teachers by administrative staff	Bullying of teachers by parents	Bullying of teachers by maintenance staff
	2003 vs. 2013	2003 vs. 2013	2003 vs. 2013	2003 vs. 2013	2003 vs. 2013
Threat to professional status	20.6**	26.3**	29.6**	8.8**	4.8*
Threat to personal standing	26.2**	18.5**	38.7**	18.6**	5.5*
Isolation	8.7*	17.8**	8.0*	5.8*	0.9
Physical aggression	4.2**	4.1*	4.4*	4.7*	4.5*

*p < .05. **p < .01.

4. Conclusion

Whereas some international research in schools indicated that forms of violence (Pickett et al., 2012) and bullying (Finkelhor, 2013; Kim et al., 2009; Molcho et al., 2009; Rigby & Smith, 2011;) in student-to-student victimization tended to decrease during last thirty years in general prevalence whereby being still a significant serious problem for students, teachers, staff, and parents. Pupils targeted bullying in the schools has received in the literature more attention than teacher targeted bullying, especially when viewing teachers as multi-targeted victims and when describing teacher targeted workplace bullying trends over times (e.g. NASUWT, 2012).

The research aim of this study was to provide a descriptive analysis of different types of bullying viewing teachers as multiple targeted victims in school settings and to examine differences in teacher targeted bullying behavior in different levels of relations: teacher-pupil, teacher-administration, teacher-other teacher, teacher-other school staff members, and teacher-parent taking account trends over time. In this study we have made use of evidence relating to possible changes in the prevalence of victimization of workplace bullying experienced by teachers across the five perpetrator categories in the period between 2003 and 2013 in Estonia.

To compare the change in the prevalence of teacher targeted bullying in schools context, repeated cross-sectional studies were conducted over the ten years time interval, and result show overall increasing rates of teachers victimization from students, parents, other teachers, administrative staff and school maintenance staff members across all categories of bullying – threat to professional status, threat to personal standing, isolation, and physical threats. The evidence supported a raised hypothesis and previous general tendencies over time (NASUWT, 2012).

Results of this study confirm previous studies (Benefield, 2004; Bradshaw et al., 2007; Kõiv, 2011; McGuckin & Lewis, 2008; Riley, Duncan, & Edwards, 2011) that teachers were victimized by multiple individuals (children and adults) within the school milieu and enlarged this issue by describing its trends over time – a significant increase in involvement in teacher multi-targeted bullying behavior across five perpetrator categories (student, parent, other teachers, administrative staff and maintenance staff) in school settings during past ten years in Estonia. In sum, teacher multi-targeted workplace bullying seems to be a universally prevalent and also increasing social

phenomenon in schools; thus, strategies to address and prevent victimization of teachers should be included as a critical element of comprehensive multi-level and multi-component bullying prevention programs in schools (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009).

Additionally, current prevalence studies supported previous studies (Benefield, 2004; Kõiv, 2011) that bullying against teachers came primarily from students and that this is where the school environment differs markedly from the working environment of other employees. Frequent forms of teacher targeted workplace victimization over the years were prevalently verbal direct victimization acts in relation to threats to professional status and personal standing, which is in line with other studies in the area of teachers' victimization by students (De Wet & Jacobs, 2006; De Wet, 2010; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; James et al., 2008; Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012; Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry 1998) and by multiple targets in schools (Benefield, 2004; De Wet, 2006; Kõiv, 2011; NASUWT, 2012). Teachers were also to a lesser extent the victims of direct physical, as well as indirect – isolating, teacher targeted bullying, reflecting consistency with previous studies (e. g. James et al.; Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012; Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998).

The current results, although providing some insights into the description of time trends of teacher multi-targeted bullying, are not without limitations. Repeated cross-sectional designs yield measurements of period trends in teachers' victimization behavior in school setting, but can not further understanding of why the changes occur. The results of the current study were based on self-reports made by teachers and are not restricted to any other occupational group. However, the overrepresentation of woman in the samples and the disproportion of males and females in school settings made it impossible to compare the amounts of female and male bullying on the basis of victimization experiences at their own workplace; and the relatively small sample size made it impossible to carry out all analysis separately for different age categories of respondents.

Despite some limitations, the information on the rates of time trends of teacher multi-targeted workplace bullying in terms of different victimization types and categories is critical for increasing teachers', staffs' and school administrations' awareness, developing effective supports for teachers, promoting positive climate in classrooms and schools, and planning workplace safety and anti-bullying policy.

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